Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

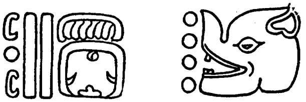
Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

JOSEPH THOMPSON GOODMAN



SEPTEMBER 18, 1838–OCTOBER 1, 1917

BY SYLVANUS GRISWOLD MORLEY

IN the all-engulfing catastrophe of the European war, which before its conclusion taxed civilization to the uttermost resources in the struggle to escape annihilation, there passed unnoted many smaller events, that in other times would have called forth extended comment in the fields they severally concerned. One such was the death of Joseph Thompson Goodman, the Californian archaeologist, journalist and writer, and the discoverer and lifelong friend of Mark Twain, on October 1, 1917.

Although Mr. Goodman was more widely known through his literary and journalistic activities, especially in California, it is rather through his fundamental contributions to the decipherment of the Maya hieroglyphic writing that he will be remembered by the readers of the *American Anthropologist*, contributions indeed which have won for him in this complex field of investigation unique distinction as the American Champollion.

Mr. Goodman was born in Delaware county, New York, on September 18, 1838, but went to California with his father in the "fifties" as a boy of eighteen. He began his journalistic career as a typesetter for *The Golden Era* and before he was twenty-three he had become the owner and editor of *The Territorial Enterprise* of Virginia, Nevada, which, under his management, grew to be one of the most picturesque of the early western newspapers.

It was while he was editor of *The Enterprise* in 1861 that he "discovered" Mark Twain. One day an obscure correspondent of his newspaper by the name of Sam Clemens sent in a burlesque report of a Fourth of July oration, which began "I was sired by the great American eagle and foaled by a Continental dam." Mr. Goodman gave the young, and we are told, ragged Missourian, responsible for this effusion, a position as reporter for *The Enterprise*, and it was under his guidance that our greatest American humorist began his brilliant career. This friendship lasted throughout Mark Twain's lifetime, and it is said he often called upon his former chief for advice and counsel in his writings.

In 1884 Mr. Goodman founded *The San Franciscan* which for its time was the most ambitious literary publication on the Pacific coast, both Mark Twain and Mr. Goodman being among the contributors to the first number.

In addition to his editorial duties Mr. Goodman found time to dip into other fields of literature occasionally. A series of historical sketches of early California and Nevada are particularly meritorious and his poem "The Death of Lincoln" enjoyed a wide-spread and well-merited popularity.

It was through fortunate mining investments on the Comstock that Mr. Goodman was enabled to turn his attention to scientific pursuits. After the Comstock days he purchased a large raisin vineyard near Fresno, California; and it was here about 1883 that he first began the study of the Maya hieroglyphic writing of Central America in the decipherment of which he later achieved such signal success.

He has vividly set forth his early struggles in this direction in his preface to *The Archaic Maya Inscriptions* where his discoveries are described in full:[1] the apparantly insuperable obstacles in the way of reading the Maya characters, his many disappointments, false leads, illusory openings, setbacks, almost despair, and then finally the slender clue which led through a maze of calendric intricacies to ultimate success.

It was the *Relación* of Bishop Diego de Landa, Mr. Goodman tells us, written in 1566 but not brought to light until three centuries later, 1864, when the famous French antiquarian, the Abbe Brasseur de Bourbourg, found it in the archives of the Royal Academy of History at Madrid, which alone made possible the reading of the Maya hieroglyphic writing.

---

[1] *Biologia Centrali Americana, or Contributions to the Flora and Fauna of Central America.* Appendix to the Section on Archaeology, by J. T. Goodman. London, 1897.

Following the meager statements concerning the ancient Maya graphic system therein contained, testing this hypothesis, rejecting that, formulating another, the well-known process of trial and error by means of which the scientist has conquered the unknown the world over, Mr. Goodman after twelve years of patient laborious research gradually won his way into the general meaning of the Maya writing and demonstrated that at least half of its two hundred odd characters deal with the counting of time in one phase or another, *i.e.*, chronological and astronomical data expressed in an arithmetic system and notation of great ingenuity and exceeding accuracy.

Like many another discovery, Mr. Goodman's priority in this field has been disputed, although the independent character of his researches and the credit due to independent discovery have never been challenged.

The first real advance in interpreting the Maya writing seems to have been made by Professor Ernst Förstemann of the Royal Library of Dresden, who in the decade from 1880–1890 published a number of studies on a Maya hieroglyphic manuscript in the Royal Library at Dresden. Using Landa's values for the day and month signs, Förstemann finally worked out the basic principles of Maya chronology, and in 1887 he announced the fundamental discovery that the long numbers of the Dresden Codex designate particular days in Maya history and are all counted from the same starting-point, a sort of Maya Birth of Christ as it were.

Curiously enough, Mr. Goodman working independently and upon different subject matter, *i.e.*, the inscriptions on the monuments, and without knowledge of Förstemann's researches duplicated the latter's remarkable discovery a little later 1883–1895. Between the two however, it is difficult to award priority in this matter. Förstemann made his discovery as early as the close of 1886 or early in 1887; Goodman on the other hand did not announce his results until eight years later, 1895, although he states in the preface to his book that he had been at work on the inscriptions for twelve years prior to that date. Perhaps the fairest solution is to recognize the priority of Förstemann in the field of the manuscripts and that of Goodman in the field of monuments; this at least has the merit of dividing the credit, which each appears to have deserved equally.

In many ways however Goodman's achievement was even greater than that of Förstemann, and in the field of the inscriptions proper, *i.e.*, the texts engraved upon the monuments, his preeminence is beyond question. In addition to duplicating Förstemann's discovery of the nature of the Long Count and the determination of the starting-point of the Maya chronological system as the day 4 Ahau 8 Cumhu, he was the first to detect the existence of the so-called head variant numerals and to identify and make known their several values; and finally his crowning achievement was the compilation of his justly famous chronological tables: the archaic chronological calendar and the archaic annual calendar, the logarithmic shortcuts of Maya arithmetic without which the decipherment of Maya dates becomes a series of laborious calculations. Although more than twenty years have now passed since their compilation, such is their excellence and simplicity that with but one minor change they are still used in preference to every other method in working out Maya dates.

As in the case of many scientific discoveries, subsequent research has curtailed the field of their applicability, so it has been with Mr. Goodman's epoch making contribution to the study of the Maya hieroglyphic writing. At first it seemed as though the Maya graphic system treated only of arithmo-calendric matters; indeed until his death, Mr. Goodman himself never entertained any other view concerning the Maya inscriptions.

The writer, on the single occasion he was so fortunate as to have the privilege of meeting the great Maya scholar scarcely a year before the latter's death, well remembers in this connection the assurance and vigor with which Mr. Goodman defended this thesis.

It was at a lunch at the Faculty Club, Berkeley, in September, 1916; and the writer, because of his studies along the same line, had the honor of sitting next Mr. Goodman, then just seventy-eight. It was a personal moment long anticipated and never to be forgotten.

The veteran scholar discussed the Maya texts for upwards of an hour, always emphasizing more and more the importance of the numerical elements, and finally in conclusion stating as his belief that it was not history of which they treated, but of arithmetic and the science of numbers; and that the only promising method of approach to the meaning of the yet undeciphered characters—the method by which he had made all his great advances, he added—was the mathematical, and not the phonetic, indeed he rejected the latter with some show of impatience.

And if in the course of subsequent research it has become necessary to abandon Goodman's arithmo-calendric explanation of the Maya inscriptions at least insofar as its exclusivism of application is concerned, rejecting his numerical values for many signs whose meanings either have been demonstrated to have been otherwise or else which yet remain to be deciphered, nevertheless practically all of the characters the meanings of which have been determined up to the present time fall into Goodman's arithmo-calendric category.

It is in fact, only among the undeciphered characters where Goodman's principles of decipherment have broken down, and the view now generally held concerning these latter is that some other avenue of approach beside the mathematic must be utilized if their meanings are to be worked out; and of such the phonetic offers the most promise.

But these later corrections, this subsequent filling up of earlier lacunae in our empirical knowledge of the subject, this supplying of details and the gradual rounding out of the whole picture, detracts but little from the magnitude of Mr. Goodman's original achievement; and mars, not at all, the enduring credit of his remarkable discoveries, since he will always be remembered among students of Maya archaeology as the one who contributed most in dissipating the mystery of the Maya writing.

Carnegie Institution,
Washington, D. C.